

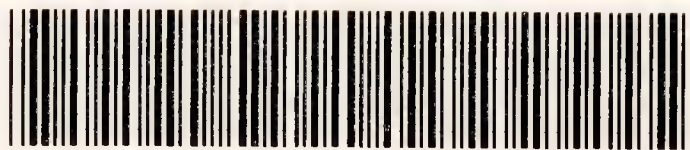
RULES OF HEALTH
PRESCRIBED FOR AN ENGLISH QUEEN
IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

BY
C. J. S. THOMPSON M.B.E.

WELLCOME HISTORICAL MEDICAL MUSEUM
LONDON 1921.

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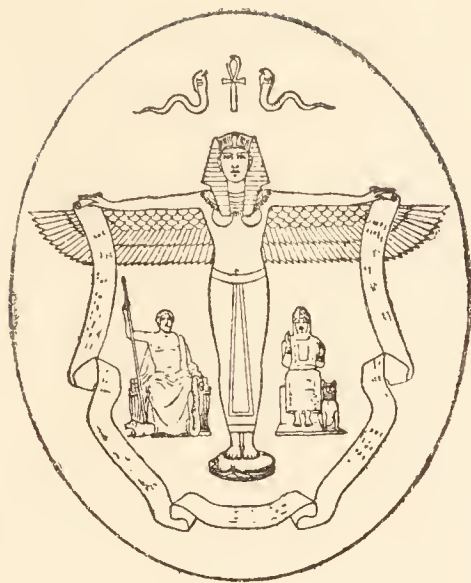


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RULES OF HEALTH
PRESCRIBED FOR AN ENGLISH QUEEN IN THE
XIV. CENTURY.

By
C. J. S. THOMPSON, M.B.E.
Curator of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum.

When examining a volume of ancient manuscripts now in the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, which consists of several medical treatises of the XIV. Century, two leaves were discovered bound with them, written in script of the same period, containing matter of considerable historical interest. They record certain 'Rules of Health' drawn up for Isabella, Queen of England and wife of King Edward II.

Isabella, daughter of Phillip IV. King of France, married King Edward in 1309, and her brother, who became Louis X., succeeded to the throne five years later. This compilation sent by him to Queen Isabella was probably written about 1315.

From the opening paragraph it would appear that King Louis had but little faith in English leechcraft, and, anxious for the well-being of his sister who had gone to live in a foreign country, he had the excellent compilation made, in which was embodied the combined wisdom of the most learned French and other physicians of the time.

The text is as follows :

Here begynneth a compilation of philosophers that was sent to Dame Isabelle, Quene of Engelande, be prayere of ye King of ffrance hir brother. Who so will kepe it sal never neden leche crafte.

These are good for ye brayn. To smelle ye savor of musk and ye savor of camamille. To drynke wyn mesurabely (moderately). To eten (eat) sauge (sage) and notemuge (nutmeg). To kemb (comb) ofte thin(e) hed. Ofte whaschyng (washing) of handes and fe(e)t. Measurabel (moderate) wakyng and slepyng. To here swe(e)tly noyse, as harpyng, lutyng synggyng (singing). To ete mustard and pep(per). To smelle reed roses & to ete letuary (electuary or conserve) made with ye reed rose.

These are evel for ye brayn. Alle maide braynnes.^a Gloteny. Drunkechip (drunkenness), late soper (supper). To slepe sone aft' me(a)te, Eyr (air) yt is corrupte. Hevines (violence) and Anger To hille (cover) thin(e) he(a)d to(o) hote. To(o) myche costyf. To ete (eat) to(o) myche hete (hot) or to(o) myche colde. Milke, chese, nootes (nuts). and to ete (eat) or (before) thu have hunger. Bathinge after me(a)te. Myche wakyng (waking). Porret (spring onions), garlek, onyons. Overgre(a)t noyse. To smell white roses. Mekyl steryng (moving) of thin(e) he(a)d.

These are good for ye syte. Rede rose. Ruwe (rue) verveyn (vervain) fenel, celidoyn (celandine), enfrase (eyebright), eysel (vinegar). To put do(w)n thin(e) eyne open in clere water. To looken often on greene color and black color. Measurabel (moderate) slepe. Ofte whaschyng of ho(a)ndes & feet. Ye stomak weel defied.^b Ofte

^a Probably made-up or cooked brains.

^b Able to digest.

kemyng (combing) of ye he(a)d. Lokynge often in a meror (mirror) or in the water.*

These are evel for ye syte. Pouder (dust), garlek, onyons, leek, hunger, wakyng (waking), wynde, hoot eyre (hot air), gloteny. Drunkenchep (drunkenness), milke, chese, long lokynge on a bryte (bright) thing, as weel whyte thinge as red thinge. To slepe sone after me(a)te. To mekil slepe, to mekil wakyng (waking). To mekil letying blood (bleeding). Smoke. Wortes of cole (colewort), mustard and other as porret (spring onions) letcheri. To slepe shod. Fire agens (against) ye eye. Breed (bread) yt is evel bakyn. Wepynge (weeping), lokynge (looking) myche on bo(o)kes. And onder (over) mekil garsynge (cupping).

These are good for ye brest. Honey, suker (sugar), butter with a litel salt, licorise, dates. To soupe rere (raw) hegges (eggs). And isop (hyssop) quo soever (howsoever) yt (it) be oosed (used).

These are evel for ye brest. Mustard, mekil liggyng (lying) on ye brest. Pep(per), anger. Alle fried m(e)ate. Alle ro(a)sted me(a)te, letchery, mekil wakyng (waking), mekil thirst, mekil drynkkyng. Raw frute, mekil cryng. Stody (study), hevines (violence), Smoke of incense. Hold chese. Over hote eyre (air) Over cold eyre. Alle sour thinges. Drye thinges. Alle cold thinges.

These are (good) for ye heart. Saf(f)ron, borage, ioye(joy),lawynge (going to law), musk. clowes (cloves), ganegale (galingale), notemuge (nutmeg), rede rose, violet, acory, (sweet flag), maces, camfor (camphor), and all clene and good wyn.

* In connection with this it is interesting to note that in the Anglo-Saxon Leech-book, of Bald (X Century) it is stated: "For mistiness of eyes many men, lest their eyes should suffer the disease, look into cold water, and then are able to see far."

These are bad for (ye heart.) Pesn (peas) benes (beans), leek, garlek, onyons, hevynes (violence). Anger, drede (dread), sorwe (sorrow), besines (business), sorwe (sorrow), to(o) mekil love, longe sittynge by ye fyr (fire), to(o) mickle travayle, to drynken cold water, evel tydyngs, evel smel.

These are good for ye stomak. Mynte, rose, comyn (cummin), suker (sugar), sauge (sage), worm(wo)od, calamynthe (calamus), every monthe to spewe ones (once), hunger, every day stondynge (standing) after mete and soft walkynge (little walking) after mete. Every cold thing and sour, ganyngale (galangal), notemuge (nutmeg), vinegar, pep(p)er and ye morwe (morning) slepe.

These are bad for ye stomak. Alle swete thinges, for why, thei swollen, notes (nuts), old chese, mekyl oyle and mekyl honey, mary (marrow) of bones yt is not weel soden. To eten (eat) or (before) thou have hunger. To ete many manner of metes at a sittynge. To drynke havynge no thirst, hevines (violence), drede (dread), besines (business). Al fryed thinges, bathynge anon (soon) after mete, to(o) mekel spewynge. To ete qwhan (when) thou art over hot of fever or of travayle. All mylk of bestes is bad save of ye gote.

Rules of Health and Diet drawn up by learned physicians became popular in Europe after the publication of the "Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum," which is said to have been composed at Salerno for Robert of Normandy, the son of William the Conqueror, at the end of the eleventh century.

This famous medical work in verse, compiled by the physicians of the school of Salerno, became a popular compendium for those who were not learned in medicine generally, from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, and its copies were multiplied in manuscript by various commentators for nearly four centuries before the invention of printing. It was first printed in Latin at Montpellier in 1480, and afterwards translated into many languages and attained over two hundred editions.

As a popular work on dietetics and health it probably achieved its aim in bringing people to realize the value of moderation in living, eating and drinking, and in avoidance of excess, as the best means of preserving health and prolonging life.

Many of these old rules of health have survived to the present day in the form of wise sayings and maxims, which have been handed down for centuries. Emanating originally from the lips of philosophers and wise men, they embody the crystallised experience and collective wisdom of past ages,

The following may be instanced as examples of health maxims that have come down to us from ancient times :

“ Rise early in the morn and straight remember,
With cold water washe your hands and eyes,
In gentle fashion stretching every member
And to refresh your brayne when as you rise.”

“Three things preserve the sight: grass, glass and fountains.”

“Dry feet, warme head, bring safe to bed.”

“Sleep without supping and wake without owinge.”

The compilation sent to Queen Isabella contains certain principles of sound common sense, and at first sight seems to bear some resemblance to the “Regimen Sanitatis.” From a careful comparison, however, with the text of the latter, the only resemblance appears to be in the similarity of some of the drugs and herbs mentioned.

Thus with reference to things “hurtfull for syte,” the Regimen Sanitatis states:

“Now shall you see what hurtfull is for syte:
Leekes, onyons, garlicke, mustard seed, fire and light;
Smoak, Bruises, Dust, Pepper to powder brought—”

which is somewhat like the recommendations in the French compilation. Rue, which is recommended as “good for ye syte” in our text, is referred to in the Regimen Sanitatis as follows:

“Rue is a noble herbe, to give it right,
To chew it fasting it will purge the sight.”

Mustard also, which is mentioned among the things as “good for ye brayne,” is referred to as follows in the Regimen Sanitatis:

“The seede of mustarde is the smallest graine
And yet the force thereof is very great ;
It hath a present power to purge the brain.”

It is thus apparent that the rules drawn up for Queen Isabella are not identical with those of the Regimen Sanitatis of the School of Salerno and similar compositions. One may, therefore, reasonably conclude, that it was an original compilation drawn up by various French physicians and philosophers of the period, embodying the best health precepts and knowledge of their time.
